

Selling Healthy Foods

An Advisor Special



A positive change and challenge for school-based enterprises



**From the
Executive Director**

In this special edition of the *DECA Advisor*, we are examining the nationally mandated new food guidelines for school food services, vending machines

and school stores. At all levels of the public school structure, individuals and committees are facing the task of finding appealing food that will also improve the health and lifestyle of our young people. Of course, our emphasis is on how school stores are adapting and even embracing the healthier options.

Because school stores are an integral part of a DECA program, both for fund-raising and for teaching business basics, the dilemmas presented by the call for nutritional food choices are falling heavily onto the shoulders of DECA advisors. In this special edition, we will show you how some advisors are approaching this challenge with wit and even enthusiasm. We will also list out some of the new initiative's best bets. There are lots of alternative choices available.

Part of your task is tactical. If you don't become part of the process, you can be crushed by it. Forward-thinking advisors have joined decision-making groups and have coordinated with the

other food decision-makers in their schools to help lead the transition. Your efforts secure a position of trust for school store enterprises and also provide an example for other food purveyors in your school systems.

As expert marketers and merchandisers, you have a strong position in this movement. You can survey and do taste tests, and you can promote. You are the ones who understand how to enlist your market in determining food choices. You are aware that if you don't listen to the market, your efforts will fail. You also know how to lead the market to new products.

Information from the *All It Takes Is Nutritional SENSE* toolkit developed in Montana is included here. You will also get an idea of how our National Advisory Board members can help you find products that fit the bill for your new approach. Candy, traditional kinds of cookies, and sugar-filled sodas were an easy staple for your business. Now you will need to explore new territory, but you can do it. And best of all, you can feel good about it!

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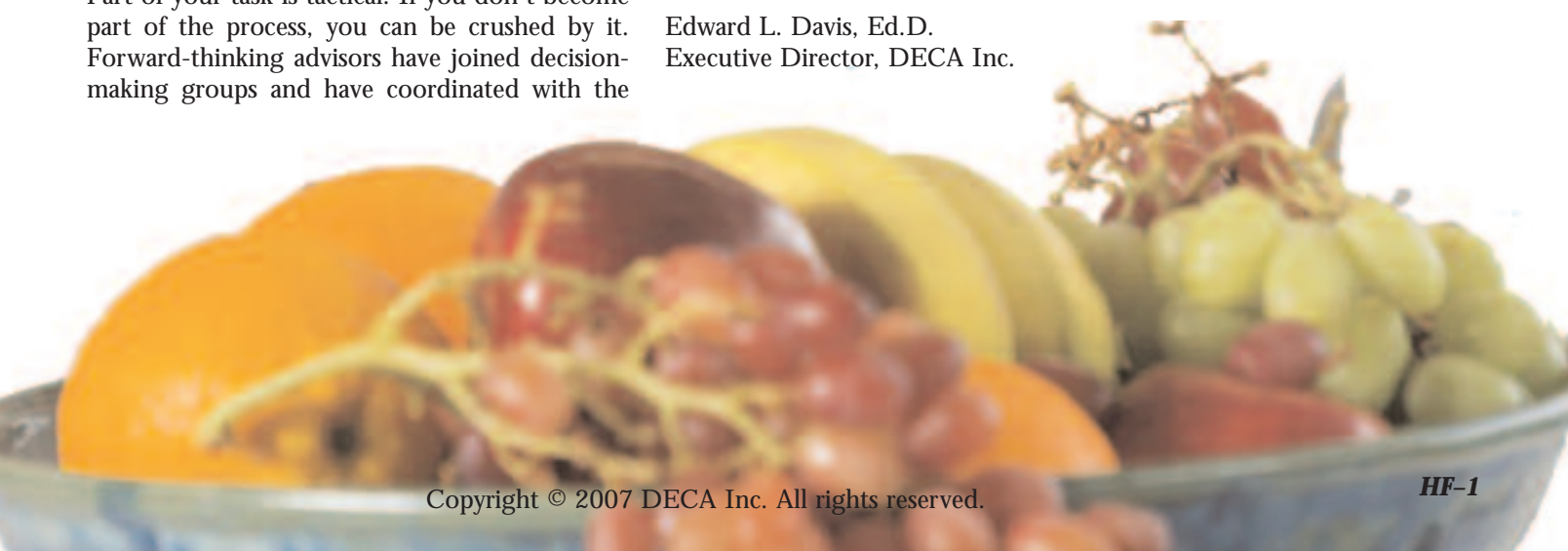
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Healthy food standards differ in states/provinces and local school systems. This report reflects a variety of approaches that respond to the requirements of particular locations and school settings.

See what others are doing, then adapt their ideas to your own situation. The story is still being written.





An enterprising school store sells healthy: from soup to nuts

Stephanie Thennis is a seventh-year teacher at Helena H.S. in Montana. In high school, Stephanie's career goal was to teach marketing. But in college an advisor said she was too petite to command respect in a high school class and should teach elementary school instead.

At that point, she decided not to go into teaching because the elementary classroom didn't appeal to her. So she got a degree in marketing (not education) and worked as general manager for several minor league baseball teams.

Finally returning to her first goal, Stephanie replaced the retiring marketing teacher at Helena High School on a provisional certificate.

Now, with a master's degree in secondary education, she has returned to the classroom, but with valuable industry experience behind her.

During its first two years of operation, the school store at Helena High School (Montana) sold the traditional food items, including many varieties of candy and soda. But as the healthy foods initiatives advanced in the state, **Stephanie Thennis**, the DECA advisor, decided to be proactive. The chapter needed to make money through food sold in the school store, and although the principal had decided on a gradual approach to meeting the new requirements, Stephanie decided to face the inevitable. The result was that the chapter took a "huge step" toward compliance. They now make even more money in food sales at the store. She says, "This has been a very positive experience for my students who are working in the store." How did they do it?

Convince yourself it will work

First of all, Stephanie says before she could convince the students that they should go healthy in the store, she had to convince herself. She was thinking, "This is going to kill us." During their first years of operation, they had been offering all of the junk food students wanted, with the object of habituating students to buy from the store. Now things would change. She was on the district nutrition committee, and her approach is that "the advisor needs to learn before he or she can help the students. I had to market this to my students."

Then convince the managers: a three-day retreat

Her first move was to take all of the store managers on a 3-day summer retreat to Canyon Lake. She set up a program of speakers so they could all become better informed. A police officer came to discuss various legal aspects of the store, especially employee theft, since they do not have a walk-in store. The officer explained that "stealing is also giving product

out to friends." A second speaker dealt with leadership.

The third resource person to speak was the local representative of Sodexo, their nationwide food service. This is the person who creates the daily menus for each school cafeteria. He taught them all about nutrition and how to calculate the sugar, fat, vitamins, etc., in food. Understanding the issues around healthy foods and gaining expertise in determining how to recognize nutritional food motivated her students.

Their next step was to brainstorm about foods, including doing a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis on their suggestions. "The SWOT analysis worked great." "The students came up with all kinds of different foods that met the formulas. I was amazed at their ideas." They were excited, so they could sell it to their peers.

Stephanie even had her students research obesity and diabetes so that they understood the point of the new regulations. "It's not just because there are mean people in the world who don't want you to have sugar."

Move gradually, but with big steps

Their district superintendent did not think they needed to comply totally the first year; they were to change gradually. Says Stephanie, "We changed a lot! We took out all the candy. We did keep gummy bears and small-sized individual reduced-fat York Peppermint Patties."

What sells?

What sells for them? Breeze Freeze, even in the cold weather. For liquids, they sell no bottled soda, but flavored water, water, juice and green tea flavored Sobe. They sell milk, both white

and chocolate, and they have now added cereal. The cereal is not doing too well, so they are doing promotions on it. On Tuesday they sell Subway sandwiches. Baked chips do well, as do small muffins, cereal bars, granola bars and nuts. Individual beef jerky packages move, and one thing that sells really well is Orbit sugar free gum (they offer a number of flavors). Tic Tacs also move fast.

Their most exciting product: SOUP

Helena High School's big coup, however, is selling Safeway Select soups from a big kettle they purchased from Safeway. They buy the soup from Safeway in sealed bags that they keep refrigerated and need only warm up. The store offers a soup of the day, served in Safeway paper cups with lids along with a small package of oyster crackers. They use up two big bags every day and get a good deal from Safeway. They decided to sell only the medium-sized bowls priced at three dollars, the same price Safeway charges. They sell out just about every day, with the tomato basil soup being the favorite. They refrigerate any leftovers in large stainless steel cans.

Are you surprised that kids would buy a bowl of soup for three dollars? Stephanie realizes, as do many of you, that if kids bring money to school, they will spend it at school. There is no mass exodus of students leaving school just to buy a sugary treat. Students are getting used to what the store offers.

Collect and organize your allies

Stephanie's biggest fear was that kids would start buying from vending machines rather than the store. This is why, she points out, "You need to have everybody on board—the food service, those who run vending machines and the school store." For this year, the principal is allowing students to purchase a soda from a fountain set-up in the cafeteria. This way they will have to consume the drink on the spot and not carry it around with them. But even that will be gone soon.

At midyear they will survey the student body about their preferences. They did not do this at first because they wanted the customers to see and try the variety of goodies before asking their opinion.

"This has been a good experience for us. It's all about education, training the leaders and letting them do it. They've done an outstanding job."

Top Selling Items in School Stores in Montana and what high school students will pay for them

String cheese.....	.25-.50
Pudding cup .....	.25
Go-gurt Yogurt .....	.25-.50
Yogurt (8 oz.).....	.75
Granola bar (generic brand).....	.25
Cheese and crackers .....	.50
Corn nuts.....	.65
Pretzels (soft) .....	.75
Bagels .....	.50
Blueberry muffin .....	.50
Breakfast bar (Cinnamon Toast Crunch) .....	.50
Yogurt Bar (Kellogg's Nutri-grain) .....	.50
PB and J Uncrustable (Smuckers).....	.75
Beef jerky (pucks-.25) .....	.25-.50-1.25
Honey roasted nuts .....	.50
Chocolate milk (16 oz.) .....	.75
Minute Maid juice box .....	.25
Fruit juice (16 oz.)	1.00
Water (16 oz.)	1.00
V-8 Splash drinks (16 oz.)	1.25
V-8 Juice .....	.25
Smoothies (made with frozen mixes*).....	1.25-2.00
Starbucks (mocha, vanilla, carmel)	1.00
Italian sodas	2.00

Prices as of 2003

*\$1.25 smoothie was made with Island Oasis frozen fruit, yogurt and ice. The \$2.00 smoothie (16 oz.) was made with Sahara Burst Premix (strawberry, tropical and peach) with ice.

Advice from DECA

School-based Enterprises

Bill Dallas, marketing specialist at DECA headquarters, is always on the lookout for companies who can help DECA advisors with their fund-raising tasks.

Last summer he conducted a survey of our gold-level certified School Based Enterprises to find out how they are adjusting to the new mandates for selling healthy food in school stores. The responses showed us some dedicated advisors who have successfully tackled the challenges of fund-raising with healthy foods. Here is a sampling of what these advisors are doing.

As you struggle to find your way toward compliance with the new food regulations you must live with, remember that you're not alone. Also, look around you at your student population and realize that what you are doing is taking positive steps toward helping young people develop a better lifestyle.

Here's what a few advisors told us about their school stores.

Patty Evans of Kentucky is beginning the change.

What sells? "Bottled water is our best overall seller. We will add fruit and yogurt this fall."

Concerns? "The biggest concern I have is the gap between the products being offered on the market and the guidelines. I find it frustrating to have the serving size limit at 2 oz. (their regulation), but a 99-cent bag of baked Lays is 2 1/4 oz. I believe it's going to take some time for the producers to respond to the market needs. Eventually the products and serving sizes will be there."

Bruce Brewer, Washington

For two years Bruce has served on a local Healthy Youth Task Force that developed standards for food served and sold in schools. He advises others to position themselves on groups establishing standards. This year half of their products must meet the standards.

"I applied for a Healthy Choices Grant and received \$750 to promote and research healthy choices that will go into the student store. So far \$220 has been spent on healthy items that a focus group of students sampled last June. About \$200 has been spent on banners that will be distributed throughout River Ridge High School. The banners were designed by students from an 'Eat Smart—Be Smart' campaign that I held in my classes."

Bruce reports that while students were unhappy with the new standards, they knew they had to promote the new products to generate chapter funds. "They are interested in finding the best-tasting products that meet the new standards."

Their best healthy item last year was fruit smoothies made with Island Oasis products. Worst selling were string cheese, V-8 juice and Quaker breakfast bars. They may sell better this year since all of the candy is gone.

Advice? "Try to stay positive. It may take some research and everything may not sell, but there are healthy alternatives that will. The good news is that DECA chapters will continue to get funds and our students won't be filling themselves up with sugar."

Cindy Whitton, California

Cindy reports that it was easy to find drinks to substitute for sodas in their store. Their soda supplier was able to bring juice and flavored waters. "Weekly my supplier brought in samples of new products that he had found that meet the guidelines."

Her advice? "Be creative. Our sales dropped to about 60 percent of what we had sold the year before. Don't make the mistake of finding healthy food companies to provide health food for you. First, the price point is too high and second, kids don't want to eat health food." "Find items that are everyday items that fit the requirements of your school or district. For instance, gummy worms are almost exactly the same as fruit snacks. Rice Krispy treats meet the requirements for fat for most schools and the students have been eating them for years."

Best-selling? Gummy worms and bears, Animal Crackers, granola bars, Rice Krispy Treats, Pop Tarts, baked chips. **Worst?** Granola, healthy flavored waters "They are too pricey and they don't have that intense sweet taste students



The local politics of healthy foods

want.” Cindy notes that some products meet the guidelines because they are now in smaller packages. For example, one Pop Tart instead of two.

Sandi Tucker, Virginia

When Dominion High School started its school store three years ago, they decided to provide healthier drink options than the drinks in the soda machines. “The Crystal Light On-the-Go packets and bottled water are currently the most popular of the healthy drink products. The Crystal Light packets have increased bottled water sales significantly.”

Sandi’s advice? “Read the ingredients, conduct a student-body or customer survey to find out demand for certain products, and research vendors carefully.

Gordon Rognrud, Montana

“We are now purveyors of bagels (from a local bagel maker), cream cheese, juices, SoBe’s, Propel fitness water, bottled water, muffins, Granola bars, Ramen noodles, Easy Mac (macaroni and cheese), string cheese, chips, gum and popcorn.”

[SoBe is a type of fitness water. Their Web site shows the nutritional value of each of their products.]

When we polled advisors with gold-level certified SBE’s (school-based enterprises) about how they are dealing with the new healthy food initiatives, we noticed that **Dianne Lauramoore**, advisor at Buchholz H.S. in Florida, had approached the challenge with an integrated program designed to gain support from all of the relevant players in her school system. She has drawn on the strength of her entrepreneurship curriculum and the educational value of the SBE (Cats Café) to enlist support from the various interests who decide what the chapter can sell at the store. So we asked her to fill in the details.

For two years, the school store at Buchholz could not sell food. They had been reselling food from three different restaurants in town, but the school determined that the store was competing with the cafeteria and put a stop to it. So when she decided to go back into selling healthy foods, she organized a joint meeting with the principal, the CTE director, the district food service director, the school food service manager and the district healthy food coordinator. Why go to these lengths to gather support? Diane says, “You’ve got to work with these people. You’ve got to have them on your side.”

“The focus of the meeting was to emphasize the educational value of expanding our sales line to include healthy food options. We shared information about DECA and the business partnerships with vendors. We stated that our purpose for increasing traffic and profit were to support DECA leadership development for our students. Our pilot program was approved for last year. Our SBE has been very successful, and we have expanded to include a new serving window and a new counter and POS to handle the healthy food items. The store operations team needs to abide by the guidelines outlined and be responsible for keeping in touch with the district food service coordinator.”

As part of their successful approach to reestablishing the SBE, they have truly made it part of their program. They received a grant as a Model Entrepreneurship Program to mentor five new academy programs. As Dianne explains, “The school store is an integral part of the entrepreneurship program.” All DECA advisors need to make the point that the lessons learned in the school store are part of their curriculum. This is not just a fund-raiser.

Dianne’s advice to other DECA chapters is: “SBE advisors should review the national food guidelines and work with their district to determine products that will meet and support their healthy food initiatives. My student team attended the district meetings to establish the accepted guidelines for this year.”

What works at Buchholz? Breeze Freeze big time. They have two machines and each machine has a different flavor. Each day they fill the machines and sell out completely. They are considering whether oatmeal raisin cookies might work.

Their best sellers are Breeze Freeze fruit drinks, hot chocolate, muffins, health bars, yogurt and Gatorade.



NAB resources for your new healthy style

Several members of DECA's National Advisory Board (NAB) provide healthy foods that have proven to be big draws with school stores switching to more nutritious fare.

Our long-time friends at Otis Spunkmeyer are producing a line of low-fat baked goods in smaller sizes that will appeal to your store's customers. Check your specific guidelines against their list to see which items will work for you and let your Otis representative know what you need. You can count on more products to help you out as time goes by.

Another product with universal appeal is Breeze Freeze. Many school stores report that the company's tasty, more nutritious drinks in the bright colors have easily plugged up the gap where sodas used to be sold. Most of our survey respondents were doing very well with Breeze Freeze. (Check out the stories in this section.) New to the NAB is Swirl, a company with a drink product similar to Breeze Freeze. (See the company introduction at the right.) Check to see what companies service your area.

You will see in the article from Stephanie Thennis that her store has had spectacular success with the special Select Soups from Safeway. Read her description of how their partnership with the local Safeway has worked terrifically for both parties.

Don't forget Tropicana drinks when you are switching to juice. Work with your local representative to see what meets your needs. Casbury-Schweppes Americas Beverage own Snapple and Motts applesauce, both excellent products to consider.

If your school will allow you to resell food made by local vendors, check out healthy foods from places like 7-Eleven and Wing Zone. And check out the great prices for granola bars, cereal, nuts, pretzels, sugar-free gum and such from Costco. When you buy from Costco, don't just walk into the store and walk back

out. Make sure to let them know that you are from DECA. You may get a lot of cooperation and perhaps special support from such a partnership. Remember that donations to your chapter are tax-deductible for the business.

A healthy alternative from Swirl Drinks, a new NAB member

DECA is proud to announce the addition of SWIRL Frozen Drinks to our National Advisory Board.

SWIRL specializes in state-of-the-art granita equipment and Swirl brand frozen drinks. Their delicious frozen fruit juice drinks are also nutritious and appeal to young people and adults alike. In addition to their fruit juice flavors, Swirl also offers cappuccino and other adult frozen beverage flavors, all of which taste great.

SWIRL looks forward to working with DECA's school based enterprises—and to any chapter looking for a fantastic fund-raising opportunity.

Partnership Strengths:

- Swirl is a great profit maker.
- Swirl's fruit juice drinks are vitamin and calcium enriched.
- Light products are available.
- You can rent a machine for fund-raisers or other special events.
- Machines will be placed free for high volume locations.
- Your happy customers are guaranteed to return.

For more information on the SWIRL/DECA partnerships you are invited to visit www.deca.org/nab_index.html and click on SWIRL.

Helpful advice online from Montana



The Montana Team Nutrition Program in the Montana Office of Public Instruction, under the leadership of Project Director Katie Bark, has put together an ambitious and very useful toolkit on the subject of nutrition. *All It Takes Is Nutrition SENSE* can be viewed at www.opi.state.mt.us/schoolfood/nutritionsense.htm. Here is some good advice from the report.

As you look for products to sell in your store, check page 51 of the Montana report. Potential products are listed under categories. For hot items they recommend

- soft pretzel with cheese sauce
- baked potato with topping (chili/cheese)
- popcorn
- soups, sandwiches (microwaveable)

Price structuring

“In promoting healthful foods and beverages, the price can be the determining factor. Try to offer healthy items at a lower price than non-nutritious items to encourage students to purchase them. For example, a string cheese may be 25 cents while a candy bar is 50 cents.”

Marketing efforts

“To market healthful foods and beverages, good taste, easy access and availability are key factors. Signage, marketing posters, and daily announcements are often recommended to remind students what foods the store has to offer. Product positioning is key—make sure the healthy items are stored where they are visible to customers. Consider offering coupons (purchase 10 and get one free) or occasional discounts on healthy items. Offer a special of the day or free samples to encourage students to try new healthy items.”

It is obvious in the Montana report that marketing teachers have had significant input into the toolkit recommendations. You can easily use your healthy foods efforts as a case study in marketing. Pages 52 to 54 of the report present procedures and even samples for focus group sessions, student surveys and taste test panels.

A section of the report explaining how to use marketing strategies to sell healthier items parallels your curriculum (page 32). You will be at home with suggestions like

- Give your store an identity.
- Commit to signage for the store.

- Product placement is important.
- Be customer oriented.

But here are a few new takes on some familiar marketing activities:

- Promote added value
“Promote foods from these four food choice factors:
B = budget friendly (attractive price)
E = energizing (healthful and smart)
S = sensory satisfaction (good taste)
T = time (convenient and easy to eat)”
- Tailor products to your customer’s needs
“Some student stores purchase single servings from vendors or work with their school food service program to purchase single servings of pre-sliced fruits and vegetables with dips from their school food service. That way, the following items can be offered safely and easily: (Sauces are served in soufflé cups.)
 - apple slices with caramel sauce
 - celery sticks filled with peanut butter
 - carrots, celery, cucumber with ranch dressing (lite)
 - banana with chocolate sauce
 - canned single servings of fruit
 - single servings of fruit in gelatin”

A few more promotions:

- “Give out free samples of a fruit or vegetable. While students are picking up a sample, gather feedback about the appeal of the item and the students’ opinions of whether or not they would consider purchasing this item in the future. Or give a free sample with the purchase of another item as a Special of the Week.
- “Have a fruit or vegetable sold with another popular item in a combo snack. For instance, a bagel and cream cheese could be sold with a piece of fruit in a sack and promoted as a High-Energy snack or a Smart Snack Sack.”

When you are adapting to the new requirements for providing healthy food choices in your school store, it’s helpful to keep the goals of the changeover in mind. (The SENSE in the title of the Montana toolkit stands for students encouraging nutritious snacks.) As the toolkit explains, healthy eating has a variety of effects:

- Healthy eating optimizes growth.
- Healthy eating helps to prevent chronic disease.
- Healthy eating better academic achievement.

